

Two Histories of World War II

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ABSTRACT

The domineering opinion during the Cold War, especially in the domestic and foreign propaganda of the Soviet Union, was that Hitler started World War II by attacking Poland and that Germany's attack against the USSR in summer 1941 was nothing but deceitful aggression against the peace-loving socialist nation. Although the pact made between the Soviet Union and Germany on the 23rd of August 1939 was not denied in the Soviet Union (what was denied, however, was the existence of its secret protocol), it was presented as an attempt by the Soviet Union to buy time and avoid war. The attack against Poland in 1939 was treated as reunification of the Western-Ukrainian and Belarusian nations with their compatriots. What really happened was that eastern Polish territories, which had been placed under the influence of the Soviet Union with the secret protocols to the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, were seized as a result of the military attack launched by the Red Army on the 17th of September 1939. Conquering the Baltic States and Bessarabia in summer 1940 was presented as domestic socialist revolutions. These countries had also been placed under the influence of the Soviet Union with the secret protocols of the same pact. The Soviet Union forced the Baltic States to surrender and Romania to give up Bessarabia by threatening military action. The Baltic States were then occupied with the support of the weapons of the Red Army and the Baltic Navy and incorporated into the Soviet Union.

The archive documents that became accessible after the collapse of the Soviet Union have helped to prove that specific plans for a preventive attack against Germany had been prepared by spring 1941. One of the reasons for the massive losses suffered by the Red Army in 1941 was the fact that Germany managed to hit it with its attack before the Red Army had completed its preparations for attack.

World War II, which lasted from 1939 to 1945, was one of the most tragic events of the past century and its aftermath can still be felt today. Much has been written about the causes, course and consequences of the war in the almost 70 years that have passed since its occurrence, and these writings contain various analyses of the war as one of the bloodiest and most tragic events in human history that still lacks an unbiased common denominator. Unfortunately, political views have left their mark on the studies of the outbreak, course and results of the war. Two different visions have been presented to the international public. On one side is the more or less realistic approach of the democratic world that is based on documents and puts the blame on two totalitarian states in Europe – Hitler's Germany and Stalin's Soviet Union, because both of them had the ambition to rule the world, or at least Europe. On the other side is the official interpretation of history by the Soviet Union, which is still popular in Russia and regards the USSR as the victim and Germany as the aggressor. The book "Falsifiers of History", edited and partially re-written by the Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin, was published in 1948 and became the basis of the official approach to the Second World War by the Soviet Union.¹ It was used during the Soviet era and the positions it represents are still widespread in Russia. Moscow has consistently accused the West, especially the Baltic States, of falsification of history. The information war where the latter are also accused of nationalism and fascism strengthened suddenly after former KGB officer Vladimir Putin was elected the President of Russia in 2000, and it has become particularly hysterical in the last decade when Putin and his team started restoring Russia's control over post-Soviet countries. This is evident in Russia's new doctrine;² foreign and internal policies; the mass media aimed at giving disinformation to the international public, its own people and the Russians living in

¹ *Фальсификаторы истории (историческая справка): по поводу опубликования Гос. департаментом США архивных материалов Герм. м-ва иностр. дел «Нацистско-советские отношения 1939–41 гг.»*, Советское информационное бюро (Ленинград: Госполитиздат, 1948).

² Виталий Аверьянов и Роман Багдасаров, *Новая русская доктрина: Пора расправить крылья* (Москва: Яуза, 2010).

the Baltic States; and the frequent defamation campaigns against Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania.

On the 20th of May 2009, the President of the Russian Federation Dmitri Medvedev signed the decree “Presidential Commission of the Russian Federation to Counter Attempts to Falsify History to the Detriment of Russia’s Interests”. The Commission’s tasks included “[...] development of guidelines for the presentation of the truth and real historical facts to the public and counteraction to the politicised interpretation of these facts”.³ President Medvedev’s decree unleashed another one of Russia’s propaganda campaigns in support of the Stalinist approach to the history of World War II. Its main arguments are as follows:

- the peace-loving Soviet Union never planned to ‘export’ the socialist revolution to Europe with the support of the bayonets of the Red Army, later the Soviet Army. Using force against neighbouring countries and occupying them in the 1930s and 1940s was necessary in order to ensure the state’s security;
- Stalin was not one of the architects of World War II – he made every effort to prevent it;
- the joint campaign of Stalin and Hitler against Poland was not a war as far as the Soviet Union was concerned – it was “the liberation campaign of the Red Army for reuniting the people of Western Belarus and Western Ukraine, who were suffering the oppression of Poland, with the big and friendly family of the Soviet nations”;
- the Red Army did not attack Finland in November 1939 in order to conquer the country, and what occurred was “a local armed conflict between the USSR and Finland”, which was not a part of World War II.
- The Soviet Union did not occupy Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania; these nations wanted to get rid of capitalist bloodsuckers and volunteered to join the Soviet Union;

³ Елена Новоселова, “Правда о войне и мире: Как государство собирается бороться с фальсификацией истории,” *Российская Газета (Федеральный выпуск)*, 20.5.2009.

- World War II was a conflict between imperialist countries and the Soviet Union had nothing to do with – it only fought against Germany in the Great Patriotic War after the latter had suddenly attacked it;
- Stalin and the General Staff of the Red Army did not plan a strategic offensive against Germany in 1940–1941; they simply tried to increase the defence capability of the Soviet Union as much as possible;
- the Red Army was considerably weaker in 1941 than the German Wehrmacht and not prepared to fight off this unexpected aggression. This was the cause of the military catastrophe in the first stage of the war as well as the mass casualties and material losses;
- the Red Army and the NKVD (*Народный комиссариат внутренних дел* – the People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs – author's note) never committed any crimes against humanity in the Great Patriotic War. On the contrary, they were the noble liberators of European nations from Hitler's occupation.

As the archives of the Ministry of Defence of the USSR were closed during the Soviet period, many researchers, incl. West-European ones, adopted certain positions of the Stalinist approach to history. However, many of them doubted its objectivity. It's true that a limited amount of second-rate confidential material, which concerned military planning in the Soviet Union from 1939–1940, was published in the 1950s when Nikita Khrushchev was the leader of the USSR, but this material didn't give a comprehensive overview of how Stalin and his henchmen planned to conquer the world or what their military activity was like at the time. The first person to question the official approach of the Soviet Union to the history of the Second World War, especially the preparation and initiation of the war as well as the main culprit, was former officer of the Main Intelligence Directorate (*Главное разведывательное управление* – GRU) of the USSR Viktor Rezun-Suvorov, who defected to the West. He compared known historical facts and figures with the official data of Russia and came to the conclusion that the latter had been falsified. He published his findings in

the well-known book “Icebreaker”⁴ and in his later works. The collapse of the Soviet Union in December 1991 and the short period of openness and democracy in Russia that followed in the 1990s led to the partial opening of the archive of the Russian Ministry of Defence that contained the most confidential documents about the Second World War. This allowed the historians who managed to access the archive (Pavel Aptekar, Mikhail Meltyukhov, Tatyana Bushuyeva, Mark Solonin, Boris Sokolov, Dmitri Khmelnitski, Alexander Gogun, Yuri Felshtinsky, Alexander, Lev Lopukhovski, Vladimir Beshanov, etc.) to reveal a large extent of the truth about the military affairs of the Soviet Union from 1939–1940.

The seeds of the Second World War were sown by the consequences of the First World War, when the Russian Empire disappeared and power was seized by the Bolsheviks, who dreamt of a socialist revolution and a worldwide Soviet Union. In 1918, their leader Vladimir Ulyanov-Lenin explained his ambitions as follows: “Russia will now become the first country where the socialist order has been established. [...] But it’s not about Russia alone – I spit at it, my dear comrades – it’s only a stage we’re going through on our way to world revolution”.⁵ The 5th All-Russian Congress of Soviets approved the constitution of the state on the 10th of July 1918. Its Article 3 stipulated as follows: “Bearing in mind as its fundamental problem the abolition of the exploitation of men by men, the entire abolition of the division of the people into classes, the suppression of exploiters, the establishment of a socialist society, and the victory of socialism in all lands.[...]”.⁶ The international union of communist parties – the Communist International (Comintern) – was formed for the establishment of the worldwide Soviet Union. It was managed from Moscow and its task was to ‘export’ the socialist revolution. One example

⁴ Виктор Суворов, *Ледокол; День «М»* (Москва: АСТ, 1998).

⁵ Георгий Соломон, *Среди красных вождей: лично пережитое и виденное на советской службе* (Париж: Мишень, 1930), т. 1, 15.

⁶ Конституция (Основной Закон) Российской Социалистической Федеративной Советской Республики (принята V Всероссийским Съездом Советов в заседании от 10 июля 1918 г.) (прекратила действие), Сайт конституции Российской Федерации, http://constitution.garant.ru/history/ussr-rsfsr/1918/chapter/2/#block_1200 (accessed 1.7.2014).

of such an 'export' was the failed coup d'état attempt organised by Comintern in Estonia on the 1st of December 1924.

Stalin considered himself a disciple of Lenin and a follower of Lenin's ideas about a world revolution and a worldwide Soviet Union. In the 1930s he finally worked out his strategy for the next period in history:

- World War II was the precondition for a successful communist world revolution – western countries needed to clash with each other, fight each other. The Soviet Union was to remain neutral during the first stage of World War II;
- the war between western countries had to last as long as possible to ensure the warring sides used up their resources to the full.

That's when the Red Army was to get involved in the war.⁷

The Treaty of Versailles, which ended the First World War, was very harsh on Germany and created the necessary preconditions for the country's radicalisation, revanchism and the Nazis coming to power in 1933. In the 1920s the leader of the Nazis Adolf Hitler expressed their credo in his book "*Mein Kampf*": "When we speak about new lands and territories in Europe, the first thing we do is look at Russia and also the countries situated in its neighbourhood and dependent on Russia".⁸

Once their global goals were clear, both dictators commenced the feverish militarisation of their countries in order to achieve them. The Soviet Union, which Stalin had turned into a slave camp, was more successful in this. The Red Army grew from 631,000 soldiers in 1930 to 1,033,570 soldiers in 1934. The number of aircraft increased from 1,149 to 4,354 and the number of tanks from 92 to 7,574. On the eve of the Second World War, the Red Army had accumulated 1,931,962 soldiers, 10,362 aircraft and 21,110 tanks.⁹ The achievements of the German Wehrmacht,

⁷ Виктор Суворов, Андрей Буровский и др., *Союз звезды со свастикой: Встречная агрессия* (Москва: Яуза Пресс, 2011), 165–166.

⁸ Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf* (München: F. Eher, 1933), 742.

⁹ Михаил Мельтюхов, *Упущенный шанс Сталина. Советский Союз и борьба за Европу: 1939–1941 (документы, факты, суждения)* (Москва: Вече, 2000), 349, 358, 359, 600 (Tables 27, 28, 30, 31).

which was preparing for a war with Poland, were considerably more modest in 1939: 1.343 million soldiers, 4,288 aircraft and 3,419 tanks.¹⁰

The might of the Red Army grew and Stalin, who had become disillusioned with the abilities of Comintern in the second half of the 1930s, decided to change the policy that was to help him achieve his goal of a world revolution. This policy relied increasingly more on the idea of using weapons or threatening the use of weapons to export socialism. The intentions of the red dictator become clear in the speech he delivered to the members of the Politburo of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) on the 19th of August 1939. Assessing the international situation, Stalin announced: “[---] the question of peace or war is reaching a critical phase for us. If we entered into a treaty of mutual assistance with France and England, Germany would give up Poland and start looking for a *modus vivendi* with the West. A war will have been prevented, but further events may be dangerous for the Soviet Union. If we accept Germany’s proposal to enter into a pact of non-aggression, it will of course attack Poland and both France and England will then have to intervene. [---] In these conditions we have many chances to remain uninvolved in the conflict and we can hope for a favourable opportunity to enter the war. [---] The outbreak of a war in Europe will open a wide playing field for the Soviet Union to develop the world revolution. Therefore, it is in the interests of the Soviet Union, the homeland of workers, that a war breaks out between the Reich and the capitalist Anglo-French bloc. [---] We must do all we can to ensure that the war lasts as long as possible and exhausts those involved in it. [---] This is why we have to agree to enter into the pact offered by Germany and make sure that the war, once declared, lasts for as long as possible.”¹¹

The Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact or the Treaty of Non-Aggression between Germany and the Soviet Union gave Hitler the green light to attack Poland. The pact had a secret protocol, where the two imperialist states divided Eastern Europe into Nazi and Soviet spheres of influence.

¹⁰ Мельтюхов, *Упущенный шанс*, 83.

¹¹ Лев Лопуховский и др., *Великая Отечественная катастрофа-3* (Москва: Яуза, Эксмо, 2008), 406–407.

Finland, the Baltic States (except Lithuania) and the territory of Poland east of the Narew, Vistula and San rivers were entered into the Soviet sphere of interest. In return, Germany was given a safe opportunity to start a war against Poland, free hands to operate in Western Europe and a two-year contract for the delivery of strategic materials from the Soviet Union worth 180 million German marks, which was essential for Berlin.¹² If Stalin had told German Foreign Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop on the 23rd of August 1939 that Germany would have the Soviet Union to deal with if it attacked Poland, the attack would probably have been called off and the Second World War would not have occurred. However, Stalin had his own issues with Poland – he hated that country. He had been in the Red Army when it went to conquer Poland in 1920 under the commandment of Mikhail Tukhachevsky and was convincingly defeated by Marshal Józef Piłsudski. The Soviet leaders did all they could to encourage Germany to start the war by supporting it in any way they could, but not forgetting their own interests when Eastern Europe was divided into spheres of influence. According to those who were with Stalin when he signed the pact, he started dancing around after the German delegation had been ceremoniously led out the door, and rejoiced: “I deceived him. I deceived Hitler [---].”¹³ Stalin really had deceived Hitler. Just two weeks after signing the pact, Hitler found himself engaged in a war on two fronts, i.e. in a situation where Germany was certain to lose the war.

Germany attacked Poland on the 1st of September 1939. It's known that Hitler feared a repeat of Germany's sad experience from the First World War, i.e. a war on two fronts. However, the appeasement of the western countries in the Munich Agreement and their passivity during his Sudetenland affair in 1938 had convinced Hitler that the United Kingdom and France would not start a war over Poland. This was later confirmed by several high-ranking German officials and military leaders. For example, German Foreign Minister Ribbentrop said: “Hitler did

¹² СССР – Германия 1939: Документы и материалы о советско-германских отношениях в апреле-сентябре 1939 г., кн. 1, сост. Юрий Фельштинский (Нью-Йорк: Телекс, 1983), 49, 61–63.

¹³ Суворов, *Ледокол*; *День «М»*, 53.

not count on England starting a war over Poland.”¹⁴ One of the most talented commanders in the Reich, Field Marshal Erich von Manstein, said: “Hitler was convinced that the West will once again decide not to grab its weapons at the deciding moment. He explained his opinion in great detail. [---]”.¹⁵ There are many witnesses who say that Hitler and the persons close to him were shocked and dismayed after finding out on the 3rd of September 1939 that the United Kingdom and then France had declared war on Germany. The leaders of the Third Reich knew that Germany was not ready for a massive war against a coalition of countries and made several attempts to secure an armistice with England.

Stalin joined the Polish campaign on the 17th of September. A 620,000-strong Red Army group, supported by 4,800 tanks, despicably attacked the Polish Army from behind as the latter was desperately trying to fight off the Wehrmacht. A great example of the ‘brothers in arms’ relationship between the Soviet Union and Germany was the joint victory parade held on the 22nd of September 1939 in Brest, which had just been seized from Poland, where General Heinz Guderian, Commander of the XIX Army Corps of Germany, and Brigadier Semyon Krivoshein, Commander of the 19th Light Tank Brigade of the Red Army, stood together on the podium as the hosts of the joint parade.¹⁶ The two totalitarian states shared the loot in a very brotherly manner. The Soviet forces were busy plundering the occupied territory until the 5th of October 1939. There are no exact figures, but it’s known that the 5th Army alone took 64 locomotives, 70 passenger cars and 1,130 freight cars, 534 flat wagons, 609 coal wagons, 104 tank wagons and large quantities of various goods (sugar, grains, flour, railway materials, iron, coal, horses, cattle, etc.) in 2,174 railway cars.¹⁷ The loot taken by the Red Army from the Polish Army consisted of more than 900 artillery guns, 10,000 machine

¹⁴ Иоахим фон Риббентроп, *Между Лондоном и Москвой: Воспоминания и последние записи* (Москва: Мысль, 1996), 145.

¹⁵ Эрих фон Манштейн, *Утерянные победы: Воспоминания фельдмаршала* (Москва: АСТ, 1999), 27.

¹⁶ General Heinz Guderian, *Panzer Leader* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1996), 96.

¹⁷ Мельтюхов, *Упущенный шанс Сталина*, 132.

guns, over 300,000 rifles, ca 300 aircraft, 19 tanks, over 150 million cartridges and a million artillery shells.¹⁸ The Germans captured 420,000 and the Red Army 454,700 Polish soldiers.¹⁹ When it became apparent that most of the Polish officers captured as prisoners of war could not be used in the interests of the Soviet Union, 15,131 of them were shot by the NKVD in Katyn alone in spring 1940.²⁰ Polish soldiers were also executed in many other Soviet prisons and prison camps at the same time. The winners formalised the final division of Poland on the 28th of September 1939 during the second visit of the German Foreign Minister Ribbentrop to Moscow to sign the German-Soviet Boundary and Friendship Treaty. This treaty also had a secret protocol where the division of the spheres of influence was changed a little: Germany relinquished Lithuania to the 'Soviet sphere of influence' and in return, received the province of Lublin and parts of the province of Warsaw in Poland.

This joint initiative of Hitler and Stalin is best characterised by the speech of Stalin's right hand, Foreign Minister of the Soviet Union Vyacheslav Molotov during the fifth session of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR on the 31st of October 1939: "The rulers of Poland boasted about the strength of their state and the capacity of their army. It became apparent that all that was needed was an initial attack of the German Army and, after that, the attack of the Soviet Army; in order to leave nothing of this monstrous bastard of the Treaty of Versailles. [...] As we know, neither the English nor the French guarantees helped Poland. We still don't know what these guarantees were even about."²¹ Molotov's *Schadenfreude* was justified. The inactivity of the western countries that had declared war on Germany on the third day after the start of the war was more than peculiar. It was betrayal from Poland's point of view. Colonel General Alfred

¹⁸ Вячеслав Молотов, *О внешней политике Советского Союза. Доклад представителя Совета Народных Комиссаров СССР и Народного Комиссара Иностранных Дел товарища В. М. Молотова на заседании Верховного Совета СССР: 31 октября 1939 года* (Москва: Госполитиздат, 1939), 9.

¹⁹ Мельтюхов, *Упущенный шанс Сталина*, 132.

²⁰ Наталья Лебедева, *Катынь. Преступление против человечества* (Москва: Прогресс, 1994), 215–216.

²¹ СССР – Германия 1939: *Документы и материалы*, 116–117.

Jodl, Chief of Operations Staff of the Supreme Command of the German Armed Forces, later admitted: “[---] we were never, not in 1938, not in 1939, capable of withstanding concentrated attacks by these countries. The only reason that we were not defeated is that some 100 English and French divisions, faced by 23 German divisions in the West, remained totally inactive.”²² The state of Poland was wiped off the map of the world.

Speaking about the Führer, his ‘brother in arms’, Stalin said in his speech of November 1939: “As a result of his stupidity, Hitler gave us the chance to build bases against him [---]. Economically, Hitler depends solely on us and we will direct his economy in such a manner that a revolution breaks out in the warring countries. A long war will lead to a revolution in Germany and France [---]. War will make Europe weak and an easy prey for us. People will accept any regime that comes after war. [---]”²³ The next stage of Stalin’s plan was based on the assumption that Germany was going to attack the Western countries – France and the United Kingdom. The war was supposed to lead to long-term conflict between these countries, weakening the largest countries of Western Europe considerably and creating the opportunity for the Soviet Union to intervene. This would have been followed by a mission of the Soviet Red Army to the West, the ‘liberation’ of Europe from the so-called capitalists and other ‘bloodsuckers’, and the establishment of Soviet power on the continent. Stalin started implementing his plan with determination.

The Kremlin rushed to take over the loot it gained from the pact with Hitler. In September 1939, it was the turn of the three small Baltic States. Estonia became Stalin’s first target, as the Red Army needed a passage from the Gulf of Finland to the Baltic Sea, which was of strategic importance in the upcoming war. Finland and Estonia could close it with their coastal batteries if necessary. At first, Soviet Foreign Minister Molotov came out with an ultimatum demanding that Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania allow the Soviet Union to establish its bases and contingents of 20,000 to 25,000

²² Василий Фомин, *Фашистская Германия во второй мировой войне: сентябрь 1939 г. – июнь 1941 г.* (Москва: Наука, 1978), 101.

²³ Татьяна Бушуева, “...Проклиная попробуйте понять,” *Новый мир*, 12 (1994), http://magazines.russ.ru/novyi_mi/1994/12/knoboz03.html (accessed 1.7.2014).

men in their territories. During his meeting with Estonian Foreign Minister Karl Selter, he announced: "The Soviet Union needs to expand the security system of its state and in order to do this, it needs an exit to the Baltic Sea. If you don't want to sign a treaty of mutual assistance with us, we will have to find other ways of guaranteeing our security, which may be considerably harsher and more complicated. Please don't make the Soviet Union use force to achieve its goals."²⁴ A massive army group was concentrated on the borders of the Baltic States to support this claim. On the 26th of September 1939, the People's Commissar for Defence of the USSR issued his command no. 043/op, which ordered the Chief of the Leningrad Military District to "forthwith start concentrating troops on the Estonian-Latvian border and to finish that operation on the 29th of September 1939. The following were prepared to act against Estonia: the Separate Rifle Corps of Kingissepp in the direction of Narva (35,448 men and 243 tanks) and the 8th Army in the direction of Petseri-Tartu (100,797 men and 1,075 tanks). The 7th Army (169,738 men and 759 tanks) was positioned on the border of Latvia and Lithuania faced the 3rd Army (193,859 men and 1,078 tanks). In total, the Red Army had concentrated 437,235 men and 3,635 tanks on the borders of the Baltic States by the 28th of September 1939."²⁵

The task of the troops operating in the direction of Estonia was "to deliver a powerful and decisive blow at Estonian troops". This was to be done as follows:

- a) the Kingissepp Group had to rapidly advance on Rakvere, Tapa and Tallinn;
- b) the 8th Army had to destroy the enemy troops and advance on Tartu and further on, jointly with the Kingissepp Group at Tallinn and Pärnu, allocating one Armoured Brigade and the 25th Cavalry Division for protection of its wing in the direction of Valga should the Latvian troops come to assist the Estonian troops. They had to attack in the Valga-Riga direction;

²⁴ Мельтюхов, *Упущенный шанс Сталина*, 179.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 181.

- c) the 7th Army had to secure the operations of the Leningrad Military District from the Latvian border. In case the Latvian troops come to the assistance of Estonian troops, the 7th Army will advance, by a rapid and decisive strike along both banks of the Daugava River in the general direction of Riga.²⁶

The Baltic States capitulated without resistance and agreed to sign the treaty of the bases. Estonia suffered further humiliation and guilt towards Finland when the Soviet Air Forces, in a serious breach of the treaty of the bases and the neutrality of Estonia, started bombing Finnish cities from its airfields in Estonia during the Winter War. The Baltic States were fully occupied under the threat of tanks and guns in June 1940. A 'socialist revolution' was carried out in Estonia with the assistance of imported communists and under the leadership of Member of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) Andrei Zhdanov. A puppet government approved by Zhdanov was handed the power. The next stage in the Soviet scenario was elections with no choice, which took place simultaneously in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania on the 14th and 15th of July. The puppet parliaments declared their countries Soviet republics and under the pressure of Moscow, rapidly adopted new constitutions that were copies of the one of the Soviet Union. The rapid sovietisation of the Baltic States followed, culminating in them 'voluntarily joining' the Soviet Union in the first weeks of August 1940.²⁷

Terror was the most characteristic feature of Stalin's system. It soon arrived in the Baltic States as well. Mass arrests started. Thousands of people were arrested for political reasons and executions by shooting started at the change of 1940 and 1941. The Red Terror culminated in the deportation carried out in 1941. The NKVD organised mass deportation of 'enemies of the people' in all three Baltic States in the early morning of the 14th of June 1941. 10,000 innocent people from Estonia, 15,000 from

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 180.

²⁷ Andres Kasekamp, *Balti riikide ajalugu* (Tallinn: Varrak, 2011), 163.

Latvia and 18,000 from Lithuania were deported to Siberia in the course of this operation.²⁸ Many of them never saw their homeland again.

The Soviet dictator's luck ran out in Finland. High on his success in Poland and the Baltic States, Stalin decided to finalise the occupation of the small country Hitler had so generously 'donated' to him with the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. He was going to achieve this with four armies that had 425,640 men, 2,289 tanks, 2,876 artillery guns and mortars, and 2,446 aircraft in 24 divisions. Finland managed to come up with 265,000 men, 534 artillery guns, 26 tanks and 270 aircraft.²⁹ According to plans, the operation of the Red Army that started on the 30th of November 1939 was to end with the conquest of Finland three weeks later. It was supposed to be a present for Stalin on his 60th birthday, which was 'officially' on the 21st of December 1939.³⁰ The Soviet leadership was also planning the immediate sovietisation of Finland. In order to do this, they quickly established a pro-Soviet puppet government in the resort town of Terijoki which was headed by Secretary of the Executive Committee of Comintern Otto Ville Kuusinen. But the small and determined nation of 3.5 million put up a strong, cold-blooded resistance against the armed forces of the attacking Soviet empire, whose population was 172 million. The offensive of the Red Army was stopped and the war started to drag on. The Finns managed to defend their independence in a desperate fight in the Winter War, which lasted 105 days. The Red Army's losses were huge. According to military historian Mikhail Meltyukhov, the losses of the Red Army in the Winter War were as follows: 131,476 men killed in action or missing in action (incl. 39,369 missing in action), 264,908 men wounded or sick (incl. 17,867 with cold injuries), and 6,116 prisoners of war: 402,500 people in total, although some Russian historians believe that even this number is not final. The unrecoverable losses of the Red Army in terms of weapons and equipment were: 406 aircraft, 653 tanks and 422 artillery guns.³¹

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 165.

²⁹ Мельтюхов, *Упущенный шанс Сталина*, 153.

³⁰ Historians (Edvard Radzinski et al.) confirm that Stalin was actually born on 6 (18) December 1878.

³¹ Мельтюхов, *Упущенный шанс Сталина*, 164.

Marshal Carl Gustaf Emil Mannerheim writes in his memoirs that Finland's losses were 24,923 men killed in action, missing in action and dead of wounds, and 43,557 wounded, i.e. 68,480 soldiers in total.³² According to the calculations of Finnish historians Jari Leskinen and Antti Juutilainen, the number of casualties was higher – 26,662 people.³³ Also, another 876 Finnish soldiers were captured by the Red Army as prisoners of war. This means that Finland lost 71,095 servicemen at most, i.e. *ca* one-fifth of their entire field army.

Germany's military campaign in Western Europe started on the 10th of May 1940. The commanders of the French Army, still basking in the glory of winning the First World War and followers of outdated military doctrine, expected the Wehrmacht to act in a manner similar to the Schlieffen plan of a couple of decades back, i.e. a strike from the north via the Netherlands and Belgium, and concentrated most of its troop in the northern part of the country. The British Expeditionary Forces were also stationed there. Paris did not worry about defending the eastern border. They were certain that the impenetrable Maginot Line, which had 35 divisions and was *ca* 400 km long, 20–25 km wide and stretched from Basel to Luxembourg, would prevent any invasions by the German troops from the east. However, the young German generals who were inspired by the so-called deep operation and blitzkrieg strategy convinced Hitler to launch an armoured offensive across the Ardennes mountains. The commanders of the French and British armies considered the latter impenetrable by armoured vehicles. The German Panzer Divisions moved quickly through the Ardennes and on the 13th of May, crossed the Meuse River at Sedan, on the right wing weakly defended by the allied forces, and headed towards the sea. The blitzkrieg of the Wehrmacht was extremely successful. General Heinz Guderian's tanks reached Pas de Calais on the 20th of May, cutting off all the southern and southwestern communication lines of the allied troops stationed in Belgium. On the 14th of June the German units were already in Paris. The British Expedition-

³² Carl Gustav Emil Mannerheim, *Mälestused* (Stockholm: Välis-Eesti, 1952), 49, 112.

³³ *Talvesõda: 1939/1940. 105 päeva Soome rahva kangelaslikku võitlust*, compiled by Jari Leskinen ja Antti Juutilainen (Tallinn: Varrak, 2002), 770.

ary Forces trapped in the besieged port of Dunkirk managed to evacuate their people by sea after Hitler gave a halt order to his troops but had to leave all of their equipment, heavy weapons and other materials behind. The armistice, which effectively marked the capitulation of France, was signed between Germany and France on the 22nd of June at Compiègne, in the same railway car where the armistice between the Entente and Germany had been signed in 1918.³⁴ The Vichy government, which was a puppet of the Germans, stepped into office in the unoccupied Southern France. Hitler now owned almost all of Europe.

Taking advantage of the fact that the Führer and his troops were busy occupying Western Europe, Stalin decided that it was also time for the Soviet Union to expand its territories. On the 23rd of June 1940 Soviet Foreign Minister Molotov told the German Ambassador in Moscow that the Soviet Union was planning the annexation of Bessarabia (Moldova) and Northern Bukovina, because Ukrainians were allegedly living in the latter. Moscow was expecting Germany to support this annexation. The territorial claims of the Kremlin were a complete surprise for the Germans. The shocked Führer had no choice but to give his consent, thereby effectively betraying his ally Romania. The military preparations of the Red Army for the occupation of these territories had started in 1940. The plan for invading Bessarabia was approved in Moscow on the 14th of June. The Southern Front of the Red Army was created for the campaign. It consisted of 32 infantry divisions, two motorised infantry divisions and six cavalry divisions; 11 tank brigades, three paratrooper brigades and 30 artillery regiments. The units were stationed on the Romanian border immediately after the approval of the operation plan. The Red Army occupied Bessarabia and Bukovina on the 28th of June. This was immediately followed by the NKVD's repressions in the occupied territories. Approximately 30,000 people were taken from Moldova to Siberia and Kazakhstan during the mass deportations of the 12th–14th of June 1941, which were organised by Stalin.³⁵

³⁴ Базил Генри Лиддел Гарт, *Вторая мировая война* (Москва: Воениздат, 1976), 73–93.

³⁵ The deportations were carried out in territories seized from Romania in summer 1940. The number therefore also includes the people deported from Northern Bukovina (pres-

Stalin's hunger for new territories was immense. In November 1940, the Soviet Union submitted its new proposals about the re-division of Eurasia to Berlin. They sought Hitler's approval for the final solution of the 'issue of Finland in the Soviet Union's sphere of influence', i.e. occupation of the country; the establishment of a Soviet navy base in the Bosphorus or Dardanelles region; recognition of the entire area south of Batumi and Baku up to the Persian Gulf as an area of central territorial interests of the Soviet Union; and ensuring that Japan waived its concession rights to coal and oil on northern Sakhalin.³⁶

One of the biggest myths that the contemporary neo-Stalinists are trying to sell to the world is that all the actions of the Red Army before the outbreak of war in June 1941 were defensive. Scientists (Mikhail Meltyukhov, Mark Solonin, Vladimir Beshanov, Valeri Danilov and others) ascertained that the General Staff of the Soviet armed forces started planning a war against Germany as early as October 1939 and that this process lasted until the middle of June 1941. As we know, Hitler gave the order for the development of Operation Barbarossa, aimed against the Soviet Union, on the 21st of July 1940. The General Staff of the Red Army developed several variants of the strategic plan for its offensive against Germany. Unfortunately, historians have so far been unable to access the strictly confidential documents concerning the operation and instead have had to settle for the summaries of these documents prepared by the General Staff for Stalin and Molotov, but these summaries do contain the most important points of the military plans. The preparation of the military operation plan was extremely confidential. It was handled by a small group of the leading officers of the Operational Directorate of the General Staff, incl. its Chief, Lieutenant General Nikolai Vatutin, and his deputies,

ently Chernivtsi Oblast), which had been annexed to the Ukrainian SSR, and from Southern Bessarabia (Budjak, Izmail Oblast from 1940–1941 and 1944–1954, later the southern part of the Odessa Oblast). This operation did not concern Transnistria, the former Moldavian ASSR of the Ukrainian SSR. See: Павел Полян, *Не по своей воле... История и география принудительных миграций в СССР* (Москва: О.Г.И – Мемориал, 2001), <http://www.memo.ru/history/deport/index.htm> (accessed 17.4.2014).

³⁶ Марк Солонин, 23 июня. «День М» (Москва: Яуза, 2009), 487–488.

Major Generals Aleksandr Vasilevsky (later promoted to Marshal of the Soviet Union) and Andrei Anisov.

Work on the plan became particularly intense in the summer of 1940 and in the second half of the year. Russian historian Mark Solonin claims that the first document about the plan of attack against Germany that was made public during Khrushchev's 'thaw' was the "Presentation of the People's Commissar for Defence of the USSR and the Chief of the General Staff of the Red Army to the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks), J. Stalin and V. Molotov about the fundamentals of the strategic deployment of the Armed Forces of the USSR in the West and the East from 1940–1941".³⁷ According to the presentation, the military operation plan prescribed Belarus-Warsaw and Belarus-East Prussia as the main directions of the strategic offensive of the Red Army. Marshal Semyon Timoshenko, People's Commissar for Defence of the Soviet Union, was allegedly unhappy with the decision to carry out the main strike in the Belarus-Warsaw direction. He demanded an additional analysis and moving the main strike south, to Ukraine.

In any case, the second, flexible variant of the strategic offensive plan was completed in the General Staff by the 18th of September 1940. This prescribed the application of the main forces of the Red Army in both the northern (Belarus) and southern (Ukraine) directions, depending on the situation at the time. These two aforementioned military operation plans became known as the 'northern variant' and the 'southern variant'. The top commanders of the Red Army presented the plan to Stalin and Molotov on the 5th of October 1940. After the discussion that led to the approval of the decision to strike the main blow of the operation in the southern or Ukrainian direction, the General Staff was ordered to lay down the details of the plan. The amended 'southern variant' was approved as the main one on 14 October, but it was also decided to prepare the 'northern

³⁷ Докладная записка наркома обороны и начальника Генштаба Красной Армии в ЦК ВКП(б) И.В.Сталину и В.М.Молотову «Об основах стратегического развертывания Вооруженных Сил СССР на Западе и Востоке на 1940–1941 гг.», Виктор Суворов, Марк Солонин и Андрей Буровский, *Правда Виктора Суворова: Окончательное решение* (Москва: Яуза Пресс, 2009), 46.

variant' properly as well.³⁸ The compilations of the detailed documents of both plans had to be completed by the 1st of May 1941.

However, work on the plan did not end here. The General Staff of the Red Army practiced both the northern and southern variant of the military operation plan in its strategic war games from the 2nd–6th and 8th–11th of January 1941. In the first war game, the Red Army carried out its offensive from Belarus in the northwestern direction, i.e. towards East Prussia. The main direction of the strategic offensive in the second war game was from Ukraine to Southern Poland and then to Hungary and Romania in order to cut Germany off from its allies and main sources of raw materials and fuel. The games prescribed no defensive action for the troops in the future war. The Red Army's offensive against East Prussia failed in the course of the war game, but the northwestern direction proved to be a great success. The variant of Southern Poland, i.e. the southern variant, was finally approved as the main direction of the future offensive as a result of the war games.³⁹ Army General Georgy Zhukov, who had been appointed the new Chief of the General Staff on the 1st of February 1941, started overseeing the specification of the documents of the military operation plan according to the results of the war games.

The plan of the military campaign was finalised by the 15th of May 1941. Historians learnt about its existence in the document "Considerations of the Plan for Strategic Deployment of the Armed Forces of the Soviet Union in the Event of War with Germany and Its Allies", which was made public during the 'thaw'.⁴⁰ The 'first strategic task' of the Red Army according to the plan was to move the troops more than 300 km deep into the territory of German-occupied Poland, to crush the main troops of the Wehrmacht positioned there and to conquer Poland and East Prussia. The plan was to strike the main blow with the forces of the Southwestern Front from the Lviv region in Ukraine in the direction of Kraków-Kato-

³⁸ Докладная записка наркома обороны и начальника Генштаба Красной Армии в ЦК ВКП(б) И.В.Сталину и В.М.Молотову «Об основах стратегического развертывания Вооруженных Сил СССР на Западе и Востоке на 1941 год № 103313», Мельтюхов, *Упущенный шанс Сталина*, 372.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 372–373.

⁴⁰ Солонин, 23 июня. «День М», 489.

wice, and to cut Germany off from its southern allies. The Western Front that was located in Belarus in the north had to strike an additional blow with its left wing in the general direction of Siedlce–Dęblin to engage the Warsaw grouping of the Wehrmacht in battles and to support the South-western Front in the destruction of the Lublin grouping. The planned duration of the operation was 30 days. The following forces of the Red Army were allocated for the performance of the task: 303 divisions (198 infantry, 61 tank, 31 mechanised and 13 cavalry) in the army and 218 aviation regiments in the Air Forces.⁴¹ The first strategic task of the offensive was to be followed by the second, i.e. the conquest of Germany.

On the 5th of May 1941, Stalin delivered a speech to the best graduates of the higher military education institutions of the Soviet Union. His message was this: the Soviet Union is now strong and its armed forces are equipped with the newest technology and armament. The state has to move from a defensive policy to an offensive policy in order to guarantee its security. An offensive strategy, which is backed-up by the powerful military equipment of the Soviet Union, must be used against aggressive Germany. Stalin's speech became the basis of the nationwide ideological work and propaganda that started immediately after its delivery and was aimed at preparing people for the impending war.

A meeting that lasted the entire day was held in Stalin's office in the Kremlin on the 24th of May 1941. In addition to Stalin the meeting was attended by Foreign Minister Molotov; People's Commissar for Defence Marshal Timoshenko; Chief of the General Staff Army General Zhukov; his First Deputy, Chief of the Operational Directorate Lieutenant General Vatutin; Chief of the Main Directorate of the Soviet Army Air Forces Lieutenant General Pavel Zhigarev; commanders of all five military districts by the western border; and members of their military councils and air force commanders of the military districts. The meeting was extremely confidential. Existing information suggests that the plan for an offensive against Germany was discussed with Stalin one more time, after which he approved it. Commanders of the military districts, i.e. wartime fronts,

⁴¹ Солонин, 23 июня. «День М», 491–492.

were given explanations of their tasks and the necessary documents for the military operation plan.⁴² The plans were so confidential that the People's Commissar for Defence Timoshenko and Chief of the General Staff Zhukov sent a special directive to the commanders of military districts, which warned them that "you, the member of the military council (the political commissar – author's note) and the chief of staff of the district are the only ones who can know"⁴³ about the preparations for the pre-emptive strike.

The historians who have accessed the archived documents (M. Meltyukhov, M. Solonin, B. Sokolov, B. Petrov, V. Kiselyov, V. Danilov et al.) unanimously agree that all of the plans developed by the General Staff in 1940 and 1941 were plans for strategic offensives, not defence. There was no strategic nor operational defence planning in the General Staff or elsewhere, which means that there was no such thing as a strategic defence plan for the Soviet Union in 1941. Developing such a plan wasn't even discussed before the start of the war on the 22nd of June 1941.

The subsequent events demonstrated that Soviet troops were concentrated and deployed in Ukraine and Belarus, the starting points of the offensive, according to the plan of the 15th of May 1941. All of these actions were shrouded in secrecy. The German intelligence had to be kept in the dark about the concentration of troops. The units moved to the border at night. Stalin demanded that the main means of transport of the troops – the railway – operate according to the usual peacetime regime, but this slowed down the deployment of new units. The Soviet Army had to finalise its preparations for the war by the 15th of July 1941. This meant that the war could start either in the second half of July or in the beginning of August.

The fact that the Red Army was preparing for a strategic offensive and there were no preparations for defence either at the strategic or the operational level was also convincingly confirmed by the placement of the Soviet troops on the 22nd of June 1941, exactly as prescribed in the version of the operation plan of the 15th of May 1941. Five fronts formed on the basis of peacetime military districts were to take part in the operation:

⁴² *Ibid.*, 179–180.

⁴³ Виктор Суворов, Марк Солонин и др., *Нокдаун 1941. Почему Сталин «проспал» удар?* (Москва: Яуза Пресс, 2011), 196.

- the Northern Front (22 divisions) against Finland whose task was to defend the Port of Murmansk, the city of Leningrad and the Kirov railway (Leningrad-Murmansk), and to guarantee full control of the Gulf of Finland. This meant that at least the southern coast of Finland had to be occupied;
- the Northwestern Front (23 divisions) in the Baltic States against East Prussia, whose task was to create a strong defence in the directions of Riga and Vilnius and on the western coast of the Baltic Sea, Saaremaa and Hiiumaa to prevent amphibious landings by the enemy. Once the conditions were favourable, go on the offensive and conquer the Suwałki region, then strike a blow in the direction of Insterburg and Allenstein (now called Chernyakhovsk and Olsztyn), thereby forcing the enemy's forces in East Prussia into battle;
- the Western Front (53 divisions) in Belarus against northern Poland and the southern part of East Prussia. The task: take a defensive position on the right wing of own front and prevent the enemy's offensives in the direction of Lida and Białystok. When the Southwestern Front goes on the offensive, use its left wing to strike in the general direction of Warsaw-Siedlce-Radom, crush the Warsaw grouping of the enemy and conquer Warsaw. This was to be followed by joint action with the Southwestern Front to destroy the enemy's grouping in the Lublin-Radom region, reach the Vistula River and conquer Radom;
- the Southwestern Front in Ukraine was the strongest (123 divisions) and operated in the direction of the main strike of the operation. The task: besiege and destroy the main forces of the enemy positioned east of the Vistula River with concentric strikes by the armies of its right wing from the Lviv region. At the same time, crush the enemy's forces in the Kraków and Sandomierz-Kielce directions with a strike on the left wing from the Sieniawa-Przemyśl-Lutowiska line, and conquer the Kraków, Katowice and Kielce regions. Thereafter, develop the offensive in the northern and northwestern directions to completely crush the northern

grouping of the enemy's troops and conquer the entire territory of the German-occupied Poland and East Prussia;

- the Southern Front (27 divisions), formed immediately before the start of the war on the basis of the Odessa Military District, had to carry out a defence operation against Romanian and German troops in the 700-km area it was covering and be ready to go on the offensive from the Chernivtsi and Chişinău regions to crush the right wing of the Romanian troops, conquer Iaşi and develop the offensive in the direction of Ploieşti.⁴⁴

The main forces of the two protagonists of the impending war, the Western and Southwestern Fronts, were concentrated into two powerful striking fists: the northern one was located in Belarus not far from Białystok and the southern one in the Lviv region of Ukraine. A second strategic echelon consisting of 77 divisions was positioned behind the first strategic echelon of the Red Army.⁴⁵ However, only 17–20 divisions reached the locations determined in the plan of the offensive by the 22nd of June 1941. The Red Army hadn't finalised the concentration of its troops yet. Whole armies from the second strategic echelon were still on their way.

Although Stalinist history speaks about the massive superiority of the German troops in June 1941, facts indicate otherwise. On the 22nd of June the Red Army had 190 divisions on the Western Front and considerably more heavy weapons and equipment than the Wehrmacht: 15,687 tanks compared to Germany's 4,171; 59,787 artillery guns compared to Germany's 42,601; and 10,743 aircraft compared to Germany's 4,846. The Germans only outnumbered the Red Army in terms of personnel – the Red Army had 3,289,851 people, the Wehrmacht 4,306,800.⁴⁶ The massive superiority of his forces in terms of heavy weapons and military aircraft probably explains why Stalin was knocked for six by the shock that awaited him on the 22nd of June. He was certain that Hitler, well aware of the technical superiority of the Soviet troops, would not dare to strike

⁴⁴ Солонин, 23 июня. «День М», 489–491.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 200.

⁴⁶ Мельтюхов, *Упущенный шанс Сталина*, 478.

first. However, the Führer knew both instinctively and based on intelligence information that if he didn't strike first, Stalin would do it soon. Hitler simply pre-empted Stalin by attacking on the 22nd of June 1941.

It was relatively easy for the Wehrmacht to break through on the wings of the Red Army's combat forces, whose massive quantities of people and technology were piled up in small areas of land and still preparing for their offensive, to surround them and destroy them or paralyse their resistance with air strikes and artillery gun fire. The attempts of the top leadership of the Red Army to implement the plan described above (as there was no other plan) and organise badly coordinated counterattacks against the Germans with their massive mechanised and armoured forces, were completely inappropriate to the situation. They all failed. Soviet propaganda has spoken much about the patriotism of the Soviet people and their love of their fatherland. The conduct of the Red Army servicemen facing the German troops in the summer of 1941 revealed that they had no motivation to defend their homeland, which had been turned into a concentration camp by Stalin. Entire units of the Red Army let themselves be captured as prisoners by the enemy or simply scattered.

The situation on the fronts in September 1941 was so catastrophic that Stalin asked British Prime Minister Winston Churchill to send forces to assist the Red Army and to land 25–30 divisions in Arkhangelsk or bring them to the southern part of the Soviet Union via Iraq.⁴⁷

According to Russian historian (retired) Major General Vladimir Gurkin, the human losses of the two sides between the 22nd of June to the 31st of December 1941 were as follows:

- the Red Army: 802,191 killed in action; 3,906,965 missing in action (mainly prisoners of war and deserters – author's note). Total: 5,979,134 people.
- German troops: 273,816 killed in action; 802,705 wounded; 57,245 missing in action. Total: 1,133,766 people.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Winston S. Churchill, *The grand alliance* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1950), 462.

⁴⁸ В. В. Гуркин, "О людских потерях на советско-германском фронте в 1941–1945 гг.," *Новая и новейшая история*, № 3 (1992), <http://vivovoco.astronet.ru/VV/PAPERS/HISTORY/DEAD.HTM> (accessed 1.7.2014).



Common parade of Wehrmacht and Red Army in Brest at the end of the Invasion of Poland. At the centre Major General Heinz Guderian and Brigadier Semyon Krivoshein (22nd of September 1939). Heinz Guderian, Panzer Leader, 96. New York: Da Capo Press, 1996

Propelled by the euphoria of his first victories, Hitler ordered a reorganisation of the Wehrmacht as early as the 14th of July 1941 to prepare for war against England and the United States after crushing the Soviet Union.⁴⁹ The Führer's grandiosity still prevented him from realising that the attack against the Soviet Union was his biggest mistake. Even if Operation Barbarossa had been a success, the 150–160 German divisions would never have been able to conquer this giant state and maintain control of its 22.5 million square kilometre territory. Crisis hit the military campaign of the Third Reich in autumn 1941. In November, Germany was facing serious military and economic problems. Colonel General Friedrich Fromm, who was the Commander in Chief of the Reserve Army and had a complete overview of the existing human resources and the situation in the military industry, reported to Hitler on the 25th of November that the state of the country's military industry was catastrophic and advised him to sign an armistice as soon as possible. On the 29th of November 1941, Reich Minister for Armaments and Ammunition Fritz Todt told the Führer openly that the war had already been lost in military and economic terms. Ending the war in Germany's favour was only possible with political solutions.⁵⁰ Then came Germany's first big defeat under Moscow in December 1941. The Führer's 'Eastern Campaign' had failed.

The huge Red Army was already standing on the banks of the Elbe and the Danube in April 1945. Stalin had completed a part of his plan to export the socialist revolution to Europe. We can only assume what might have happened in Europe if Stalin had managed to be the first to go on the offensive in 1941. The only serious obstacle he encountered was the Wehrmacht of Hitler's Germany, the country that had fallen out with almost all Western European countries and the US. Otherwise, the western border of the great Soviet Union may have run along the eastern coast of the Atlantic.

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⁴⁹ Мельтюхов, *Упущенный шанс Сталина*, 513.

⁵⁰ Клаус Рейнгардт, *Поворот под Москвой: Крах гитлеровской стратегии зимой 1941/1942 гг.* (Москва: Воениздат, 1980), 219.

Approximately 50 million people lost their lives in World War II. More than half of them – 27 million – were residents of the Soviet Union. The economies and infrastructures of tens of countries were destroyed. The main organisers of this catastrophe were Hitler and Stalin, the dictators at the head of two totalitarian states, both with ambitions to rule the world. The pathetic ‘non-intervention’ and ‘appeasement’ policy of the large countries of the West contributed to everything these two did to start the war. Whilst the defeated Germany had the guts and the integrity to admit its guilt and try to compensate the other nations for the suffering caused to them by the Reich, the Soviet Union and its successor Russia keep justifying the crimes committed by Stalin and his regime against neighbouring nations. Hitler and National Socialism were given a fair trial in international court and the world, but neither Stalin nor Stalinism have been held accountable for their actions yet. The Russian nation, which suffered the biggest losses in the war, still hasn’t given a fair assessment of his crimes either.

Looking at the authoritarian and quick-to-arm Russian Federation, intent on restoring the empire, and the complacent Western Europe, which is focussed on enjoying the good life, drowning in minute, everyday concerns and losing its defensive capability, we cannot help but wonder whether the events related to World War II could reoccur in the future. Will we be witnessing Munich No. 2, Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact No. 2 or the second Yalta, where the fate of small countries is decided behind their backs? Can the potential aggressors of today be reined in? Does Europe have enough unity and desire for the practical implementation of collective defence?



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